

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 152120 TOSEC 050004

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ORIGIN ARA-10

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 152120 TOSEC 050004

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS:PINT, CO

SUBJECT: BRIEFING MEMORANDUM: STATE OF SIEGE IN COLOMBIA

REF: BOGOTA 5959

TO THE SECRETARY FROM ROGERS

SUMMARY: THE STATE OF SIEGE IN COLOMBIA IS A RELUCTANT RESPONSE BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO WIDESPREAD DISORDERS. DISILLUSIONMENT OVER LOPEZ' INABILITY TO FIND QUICK SOLUTIONS TO COLOMBIA'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS UNDERLIES THE UNREST IN COLOMBIA, BUT LOPEZ IS STILL FIRMLY IN CONTROL. THERE SHOULD BE NO APPRECIABLE EFFECT ON OUR INTERESTS IN OR RELATIONS WITH COLOMBIA, AND LOPEZ' STATE VISIT IN SEPTEMBER SHOULD NOT BE AFFECTED. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT ALFONSO LOPEZ DECREED A NATIONWIDE STATE OF SIEGE ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 26 FOLLOWING SEVERAL  
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PAGE 02 STATE 152120 TOSEC 050004

WEEKS OF PUBLIC DISORDERS IN A NUMBER OF CITIES, AND A

MARKED INCREASE IN KIDNAPPINGS AND RURAL GUERRILLA VIOLENCE. LOPEZ' ACTION CAME TWO WEEKS AFTER HE HAD IMPOSED A SIMILAR MEASURE IN THREE OF COLOMBIA'S LEADING DEPARTMENTS (STATES). THE MEASURE GIVES THE MILITARY INCREASED POWERS TO DEAL WITH PUBLIC ORDER PROBLEMS, AND UNDER IT CERTAIN CIVIL LIBERTIES CAN BE SUSPENDED IF DEEMED NECESSARY. LOPEZ' ACTION IS PERMITTED UNDER ARTICLE 121 OF THE COLOMBIAN CONSTITUTION. THE SITUATION IN COLOMBIA WAS GENERALLY CALM ON JUNE 27.

2. LOPEZ ACTED RELUCTANTLY, SINCE HE HAD PROMISED AT HIS 1974 INAUGURATION THAT HE WOULD ONLY IMPOSE A STATE OF SIEGE AS A "LAST RESORT". THE IMPOSITION OF THE STATE OF SIEGE DETRACTS FROM HIS LEFT-OF-CENTER IMAGE. THE DISORDERS WHICH LED TO HIS ACTION CAME ABOUT IN A CLIMATE OF GROWING DISILLUSIONMENT WITH LOPEZ FOR HIS INABILITY RAPIDLY TO CORRECT COLOMBIA'S MANIFOLD ECONOMIC WOES, INCLUDING INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND MALDISTRIBUTION OF INCOME. THE CURRENT WORLD RECESSION HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN COLOMBIA'S SHORT-TERM PROBLEMS. OVER THE LONG RUN THE ECONOMIC MEASURES HE IMPLEMENTED LAST FALL SHOULD BE BENEFICIAL.

3. THE STATE OF SIEGE WILL INCREASE OPPOSITION TO LOPEZ FROM THE LEFT, BUT AT THE SAME TIME HE WILL NOW HAVE THE TOOLS TO DEAL WITH DISORDERS. LOPEZ REMAINS IN FIRM CONTROL, AND HAS PROBABLY IMPROVED HIS STANDING WITH THE MILITARY AND BUSINESS LEADERS.

4. IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WILL APPRECIABLY AFFECT OUR INTERESTS IN COLOMBIA OR THE SEPTEMBER STATE VISIT OF LOPEZ. AMERICANS HAVE NOT BEEN TARGETS OF THE RECENT DISORDERS, EXCEPT FOR A SMALL DEMONSTRATION AT THE EMBASSY. DURING THE PAST 30 YEARS STATES OF SIEGE HAVE BEEN IN EFFECT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT IN COLOMBIA. LOPEZ' PREDECESSOR, MISAEL PASTRANA, HAD A STATE OF SIEGE IN EFFECT FOR THREE OF HIS FOUR YEARS IN OFFICE. SO IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT THE SITUATION IS NOT ABNORMAL. INGERSOLL

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